

Statement on Drug Use By Prison Inmates

April 26, 1998

The report on jail inmates released today by the Justice Department confirms the urgent need for Government at all levels to pursue a policy of coerced abstinence for drug offenders. The report shows that more than half of these criminals used drugs in the month prior to their arrest. We have an obligation to install a tough system of testing, treatment, and punishment for drug offenders to prevent them from returning to the streets with dangerous drug habits intact. Congress can take the lead by adopting my administration's proposals to promote coerced abstinence throughout the criminal justice system.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 25 but was embargoed for release until 4:30 p.m. on April 26.

Remarks at the Premiere of "Ragtime"

April 26, 1998

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, when we were being ushered up the aisle and backstage and we were preparing to come up here, I was full of ambivalence, frankly. I wanted so badly to come up here and thank Garth and the magnificent cast, musicians, people backstage, everybody who had anything to do with this unbelievable gift we have been given. I wanted to thank the leaders of the Democratic Party and the staff. I wanted to especially thank all of you for being here and for making this weekend, celebrating our 150th birthday as a party, a success. But I was absolutely convinced that anything I would say would be a complete anticlimax after the ringer they have put us through today. [*Laughter*]

I was thinking on the way over here about the time when Mr. Doctorow published this magnificent novel over 20 years ago now, and Hillary and I were young law professors living in the mountains of north Arkansas. And I read the book almost immediately after it came out. I couldn't put it down. I just sat

there, read right through it. And after it was over, I felt just as I felt after the show was over.

But I don't think even then I fully grasped the life force behind the stories in "Ragtime." And I think what I would like to say to you is that, yes, this is the story of America, and it reminds us that we have a good system and the best ideals, but we always fall a little short. And the story of our country has to be the continuing effort to overcome our own individual flaws and imperfections and tendency to fall into injustice and bigotry and oppression and greed and shortsightedness, or just plain tone-deafness but that there is also a part of the human condition which makes us vulnerable as people.

I was walking down the aisle and several of you said, thank you so much for what you did to try to help the Irish people process along. And then I saw the representative of my ancestors, the Irish fireman here—[*laughter*—]playing the heavy. We got a book last week, Hillary and I did, entitled "How The Irish Became White." [*Laughter*] And it basically talks about how, when the Irish immigrants first came here, they really identified with the African-American slaves because they were treated the same way, and they had much the same experience.

I say that to remind us all that there will always be the tendency of people to abuse power if they can abuse it. That's why we have a constitution which seeks earnestly to limit that. And all of us will always have our imperfection, and so will our children and grandchildren and their grandchildren. The thing that makes America great is that we have the right ideals and that through history we have constantly sought to overcome our own limitations, to stand for deeper freedom, to stand for wider opportunity, to stand for a more perfect Union.

And I hope that all of you will always remember what you saw on this stage tonight. I hope you will never, ever abandon what brought you here to this performance tonight. And I hope all of your lives you will try to create more of the joy you saw here, eliminate all the oppression you can, and be very proud to be both an American and a Democrat.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:30 p.m. at the National Theater. In his remarks, he referred to Garth H. Drabinsky, chairman and chief executive officer, Livent, Inc.; and author E.L. Doctorow.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner

April 26, 1998

Thank you. Thank you very much. Let me see, we have now seen a magnificent musical rendition of a wonderful novel. We heard two fine speeches. If I had any sense, I would sit down. [*Laughter*]

When Bob was talking about that obscurity is forever, I think the Vice President is too sensitive. I thought he was talking about being a former President, not being a—[*laughter*].

I want to thank the Kogods and the Smiths and all their family members for having us in this magnificent home, for giving us a chance to look at all the wonderful art, for being in this beautiful tent. I'm delighted with the weather, and I'm delighted with the company. I want to thank the leaders of our party and the cochairs of this event tonight.

As you leave here—and the Vice President has already said a lot of the things that I think should be said about what it means for a party to be 150 years old. But let me say, when Hillary and I were in Chile recently, someone, I think on her staff, got us a copy of a speech which Theodore Roosevelt gave in Chile after he left the White House in the early part of this century, a speech which I have to say I believe the members of his party ignored.

But it's brilliant speech about how in politics, if you want to really matter, you have to be faithful to eternal values, but you have to always be willing to lift the dead hand of history off your politics, always be willing to do whatever is necessary to advance the expansion of freedom and opportunity for people, and never to be paralyzed by what you used to do when it no longer makes sense.

It's really quite a brilliant speech, and I read it when I was in Chile, thinking, that's what I think, and that's what I think our party embodies.

What I would like for you to think about, leaving here tonight, basically are just three

things. Number one, in terms of what we're going to do in the next 2½ years, in order to continue to win Presidential elections, win back the Congress, and become the dominant party in the country again, I think we not only have to continue to win with an aggressive, specific agenda; I think we have to also keep pushing the big ideas—that we do believe in opportunity for everybody; we do believe that we should expand the reach of human freedom; we do believe that we're stronger as a diverse country.

And there are two or three really simple things that I would like to mention that to me are quite important. And frankly, I haven't succeeded yet in convincing huge numbers of the American people that this has to be a part of our thinking. The first is that it no longer makes sense to have a clear, bright line between what is an American domestic policy and what is a foreign policy. Now, if I had succeeded in doing that, we wouldn't have some of the disputes we still have in our country today, and there would be more support in our country for paying our U.N. dues, investing in the International Monetary Fund, being responsible citizens in every way.

I think the American people know we're living in an interdependent world, but it's not such a high priority that politicians for their own purposes don't feel they can—they still feel free to walk away from some of our responsibilities in the world. And I think that's a great mistake, because I can tell you—you know, I believe that every nation I have set foot in as President, I was doing something that was good for the American people and their future and our children's future.

You do not have to be a Jewish-American or an Arab-American to know that the children of our country will have a brighter future if there is peace in the Middle East. You don't have to have come out of central Europe to know that the children of our country will have a brighter future if there is peace in Bosnia. You don't have to be Greek or Turkish to know that we'd be a whole lot better off if we'd resolve the problems over Cyprus. You don't have to be Indian or Pakistani to know that it would be an ultimate disaster if those two great nations went to war over Kashmir, when they could